

HOLY WAITING

Living in Holiness as We Await the Return of Christ

Holy Waiting

Key Idea:

Holy waiting is not passive — it is the wide-awake, sober, light-filled life of those who know Christ is coming, live in light of that Day, and encourage one another to do the same.

Key Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 ESV

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Key Points:

- **The Day of the Lord Is Coming** — Paul picks up from 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and turns to the question of “times and seasons” — the Day of the Lord. This phrase has deep roots in the Old Testament prophets, where it referred to a coming day of both judgment and salvation (Amos 5:18–20). Jesus took up the same theme, identifying the coming of the Son of Man with the coming of Yahweh and using the image of a thief in the night to stress its sudden, unexpected arrival (Matthew 24:36–44). Paul and Peter both draw directly from Jesus’ teaching. The Day of the Lord is not a speculation — it is a certainty.
- **The Day of the Lord Is Darkness for Those Who Reject God** — For those who persistently reject God, His grace, and His Gospel, the Day of the Lord will come like a thief — sudden, inescapable, and bringing destruction rather than blessing. The world’s false confidence (“There is peace and security”) will be shattered like labor pains that cannot be stopped or reversed (v3). This applies not only to those alive at Christ’s return but to every person at death, which is a personal “day of the Lord.” The urgency of the Gospel is real: do not persist in rejecting the grace of God offered through Jesus Christ.
- **Believers Are Children of the Day, Not the Night** — Paul’s great contrast is between two groups defined by their relationship to light and darkness, day and night. Believers are not in

darkness — they know Christ is coming, even if they do not know when. This knowledge shapes everything. Paul strings together a chain of contrasting metaphors: day vs. night, light vs. darkness, awake vs. asleep, sober vs. drunk. The goal at the bottom of each column is the same: the prepared versus the surprised. Identity drives ethics — because we are children of the day, we are called to live like it.

- **Holy Waiting Means Being Awake, Sober, and Clothed in Armor** — The three metaphors Paul develops — light (Eph 5:6–9), awake (Rom 13:11–14), and sober (1 Pet 1:13–16) — are all New Testament shorthand for holy living. To be awake is to cast off the works of darkness and walk properly. To be sober is to set one's hope fully on the grace coming at Christ's revelation, which governs conduct now. And to be clothed in the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation is to be actively, intentionally armored for the spiritual battle of living in holiness while the world presses us toward sleep and sin.
- **Holy Waiting Is Fueled by Gospel Certainty** — The foundation of all this holy living is not fear of judgment but the certainty of salvation. God has not destined us for wrath but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ, who died for us (vv9–10). Whether we are alive or have already died when He returns, we will live with Him. This is the same comfort Paul offered in 4:13–18. Holy waiting is not anxious striving — it is the confident, wide-awake life of those who know where the story ends and want to live in light of it now.
- **Holy Waiting Is a Community Practice** — The passage closes not with a solitary command but a communal one: “encourage one another and build one another up” (v11). Holy waiting is not a private discipline — it is something the church does together, like runners spurring one another toward the finish line. Satan, the world, and the flesh conspire to lull us into sleep; the community of believers is God's provision to keep us awake. We are accountable to one another for living in light of the Day, and we are responsible to one another for mutual encouragement toward that end.

Discussion Questions:

- Bret opened with the image of couples who invest enormous energy in preparing for a wedding ceremony but neglect preparation for the marriage itself. In what ways do you think Christians make a similar mistake with the return of Christ — focusing on the wrong things or neglecting preparation altogether? What does it look like to prepare rightly?
- The phrase “the Day of the Lord” has roots going back to Amos, who told Israel they had completely misunderstood what they were asking for (Amos 5:18–20). What did Israel get wrong about the Day of the Lord? In what ways do Christians today repeat similar misunderstandings — assuming the Day of the Lord is only bad news for others and only good news for “us”?
- Jesus connected the Day of the Lord with His own return as the Son of Man, and Bret noted that this is one of the pointers to the deity of Christ in the Gospels. How does the identification of Jesus with Yahweh — the coming One — shape the way you think about the Second Coming? Does it change what you expect that Day to feel like?
- Paul says the Day of the Lord will come “like a thief in the night” and bring sudden destruction to those saying “there is peace and security.” Bret applied this not only to the final Day but to every

person's death as a personal "day of the Lord." How does that application land for you? Does it change the urgency with which you think about sharing the Gospel with those around you who do not yet know Christ?

- Paul's chain of contrasting metaphors — day/night, light/darkness, awake/asleep, sober/drunk — all point toward a single contrast: prepared vs. surprised. Which of these metaphors speaks most directly to where you find yourself spiritually right now? Are there areas of your life where you are more "asleep" or "in the dark" than awake and sober?
- Romans 13:11–14 — the passage that precipitated Augustine's conversion — uses the same contrasting metaphors as 1 Thessalonians 5 and explicitly connects waking from sleep with casting off immoral behavior and putting on Christ. What does it tell us about the relationship between eschatology and ethics? Why do you think a firm grasp on the return of Christ produces holiness rather than passivity?
- First Peter 1:13–16 uses "sober-minded" as a call to set our hope fully on the grace coming at Christ's revelation — and links that hope directly to holy conduct. Bret said that a sober person recognizes Christ will return and "wants to hear 'well done' so much that it governs their conduct now." How consistently does the prospect of hearing "well done" actually shape your daily decisions? What would change if it did so more?
- Bret noted that many Christians today focus on charts, timelines, and sign-seeking when it comes to eschatology — but the New Testament never encourages this. Instead, it consistently calls believers to holy waiting: awake, alert, and prepared through holy living — no matter when Christ will return. Why do you think the sign-seeking approach is so attractive? What does it get wrong, and what does the New Testament's approach get right that sign-seeking misses?
- The armor Paul describes in verse 8 — the breastplate of faith and love, the helmet of the hope of salvation — echoes Isaiah 59:17 and anticipates Ephesians 6. But here the armor is not for fighting the world; it is for protecting the believer's own soul in the long wait. What does it look like practically to "put on" this armor in daily life? Which piece do you most need to be intentional about wearing right now?
- The closing command is communal: "encourage one another and build one another up" (v11). Bret compared this to runners spurring one another toward the finish line. Who in your life is currently doing this for you — calling you to stay awake, sober, and living in light of eternity? Who are you doing this for? Is there someone in your group or church who needs you to come alongside them with this kind of encouragement right now?

For Further Study:

- Read Amos 5:18–20 and Matthew 24:36–44 side by side with 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. Trace the phrase "Day of the Lord" from the Old Testament prophets through Jesus' teaching to Paul's letter. What stays consistent across all three? What does Jesus add or clarify? How does seeing the full arc sharpen your understanding of what Paul is calling the Thessalonians — and us — to?

- Study Romans 13:11–14 and 1 Peter 1:13–16 as companion texts to 1 Thessalonians 5:4–8. All three passages link the anticipation of Christ’s return to a call for holy, sober, wide-awake living. Note how each passage connects the indicative (what is true about us) to the imperative (how we are therefore called to live). How does the grammar of grace — “you are, therefore be” — show up in each?
- Meditate on 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 — the benediction text from Sunday. Paul’s prayer is that God would sanctify believers “completely” — spirit, soul, and body — and keep them blameless until Christ’s coming. The ground of the prayer is God’s faithfulness, not human effort. How does this benediction reframe the call to holy waiting that fills the preceding verses? What difference does it make that the One calling us is also the One who “will surely do it”?
- This week, do a personal “awake or asleep” inventory. In which areas of your life are you most alert and sober — actively living as a child of the day? In which areas has the world, the flesh, or the enemy most successfully lulled you toward sleep? Bring those specific areas before God in prayer, asking Him to sanctify you completely as He has promised.
- Visit the church website to explore teachings organized by [series](#), by [Scripture](#), or by [topic](#) for deeper study of [the second coming](#), [eschatology](#), or [holiness](#).